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Cover Page Footnote

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ABSTRACT

While serving overseas in the early to mid-twentieth century, American servicemen often engaged in relationships with foreign women and wanted to bring these women back to the United States as wives. Following the Korean War, many of the more than 6,000 women who married American military men immigrated to the United States. Often referred to as GI War Brides, these women faced discrimination, tried to assimilate into American culture, and struggled to share their stories. Through the examination of government documents, personal stories, and cultural expectations, this paper argues that Korean War Brides' experiences in America differed very little from the struggles experienced by other minority and immigrant groups in the United States.

The Korean War has long been dubbed "the Forgotten War," but in all the things forgotten about this war, there exists a group of especially overlooked people: the Korean War Brides. Many American GIs engaged in relationships, either sexual or otherwise, with women of other nations while overseas. Some GIs decided to continue these relations and to bring the women—as well as any children they may have fathered—back with them to the United States. Between 1950 and 1964, over 6,000 Korean women immigrated to America as GI Brides.[1] Most scholarship on War Brides discusses the Japanese or even European War Brides from Post-World War II.[2] Only a few authors, such as Grace M. Cho, Amy Lee, and Joseph Tse-Hei Lee, have written about Korean War Brides, though many times with the inclusion of a personal connection. For example, as the daughter of a War Bride, Cho often chooses to write of her mother's experiences.[3] However, not much research covers the correlation between the treatment of Korean War Brides and other minority groups by white Americans in the United States. Even though the history has been

[1] Eui-Young Yu, "Korean-American Women: Demographic Profiles and Family Roles," in Eui-Young Yu and Earl H. Phillips, ed., *Korean Women in Transition: At Home and Abroad* (Los Angeles: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1987), 185.

[2] Miki Ward Crawford, Shizuko Suenaga, and Katie Kaori Hayashi, *Japanese War Brides in America: An Oral History*, (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010); Anna C. Amundson, "This is My Home, and My Husband is Here," *South Dakota History* 40, no. 3, (2010): 256-285; Caroline Chung Simpson, "'Out of an Obscure Place': Japanese War Brides and Cultural Pluralism in the 1950s," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 10, no. 3, (1998): 47-81.

[3] Grace M. Cho, "Disappearing Acts: An Immigrant History," *Cultural Studies* 18, no. 5, (2018): 307-313; Grace M. Cho, "Diaspora of Camptown: The Forgotten War's Monstrous Family," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 34, no. ½, (2006): 309-331.

forgotten, this paper argues that the negative treatment of Korean War Brides in America following the Korean War differed little, if at all, from that experienced by other immigrant groups in the United States. These Korean women and their children experienced discrimination throughout their towns, had to assimilate into American culture, and struggled to share their experiences.

Discrimination serves as perhaps the most noticeable way these women compare to other minorities in America. This inequity comes in all forms of actions, including programs and policies enacted by the federal government. After World War II, many American soldiers had married or engaged in relationships with foreign women and wanted to bring them back to the United States. To help expedite the process and make it possible for soldiers to marry foreigners, Congress passed the War Brides Act of 1945.[4] This law basically made it possible for WWII GI Brides to be accepted into the United States without counting against the immigrant quota of their respective countries.[5] In 1946, Congress passed the Alien Fiancée or Fiancé Act, which extended the War Brides Act to the GI Brides of other wars and other nations. It provided for the immigration of the Bride to America through a three-month visa.[6] Within that period, the couple had to provide proof of marriage or the immigrant faced deportation.[7] While many Brides who immigrated to the U.S. looked like white Americans, many did not and, therefore, experienced heavy discrimination.

Following the Korean War, some Korean GI Brides experienced horrid treatment—something they had not anticipated encountering in America. In the nineteenth century, when America experienced an influx of immigrants, these people believed the United States symbolized the "land of plenty"—that all their dreams would come true in the foreign land.[8] Koreans during the twentieth century were no different. Cho notes in her article that many Koreans believed "America [to be] a mythic place where there was no poverty or racism, and anyone could make it big."[9] In the eyes of many Asians, the United States embodied the "land of opportunity, freedom and even altruism."[10] In fact, these women often married American military men to escape the poverty and horror of their lives in Korea, among other reasons.[11] However, their dreams did not necessarily reflect reality.

Upon arrival in the United States, Korean women experienced unanticipated hardships. According to Amy Lee and Joseph Tse-Hei Lee, Korean women endured "an extension of their

[4] *Cong. Rec.,* 79th Cong., 1st sess., 1945, stat. 59, chap. 591: 659-660.

[5] Ibid.

[6] *Cong. Rec.*, 79th Cong., 2nd sess., 1946, stat. 60, chap. 520: 339-340; Ji-Hye Shin, "Korean War," Immigration to the United States, last modified 2015, accessed April 23, 2019, http://immigrationtounitedstates.org/674-korean-war.html.

[7] *Cong. Rec.*, 79th Cong., 2nd sess., 1946, stat. 60, chap. 520: 339-340.

[8] Gertrude (Gudrun) Hildebrandt Moller, interview by Janet Levine, Ph.D, October 5, 1992, Ellis Island Collection, El-222; Catherine Gaetano Gallippi, interview by Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., December 12, 1990, Ellis Island Collection, El-17; Catherine Hannon English, interview by Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., November 17, 1991, Ellis Island Collection, El-116.

[9] Cho 2018, 310.

[10] Warren I. Cohen and Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, "America in Asian Eyes," *The American Historical Review* 111, no.4 (2006): 1099.

[11] Debbie Storrs, "Like a Bamboo: Representations of a Japanese War Bride," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 21, no. ½ (2000): 198, 214; Cho 2006, 316.

suffering and nightmares in South Korea."[12] An oral history interview with Korean War Bride Jung Ja Kim Putman illustrates the overt discrimination she faced, much like other immigrants and minorities. She married several years after the cessation of the Korean War and arrived in America with her new husband and one-year old daughter in 1957. While she may have been welcomed by her in-laws, others she met did not like her presence, mostly because of her appearance. After arriving in Washington D.C. by ship, Putman and her new family ventured to a restaurant. There they encountered a strange man who, so angered at the sight of her, picked up a chair to throw at the Putman family. Putman's GI husband told her that because they had just finished the war, some people probably would not like her presence. He encouraged her to ignore them, an action Putman tried to undertake.[13] However, she was not the only one to experience such outward displays of contempt. A decade earlier Japanese War Brides faced similar encounters. Several stories told by these ladies include extreme hatred and a severe racism.[14]

Amidst the discrimination from white Americans, racism among War Brides also existed based on the race of their husbands. Those who wedded white men looked with disdain upon those who married black men.[15] Women commonly adopted the racial tendencies of their new nation as part of their integration into American culture.[16] Like many new immigrant groups, claiming "whiteness" meant privilege and status, an unfortunate but effective means of assimilation.

While much of this discrimination occurred throughout the 1940s and 1950s, early in the 1950s, American media portrayed an acceptance of the GI Brides. An article in *Life* Magazine from November 1951 helped to create this illusion that Korean War Brides were well-received and greeted with open arms. Nicknamed "Blue" for the color of her sweater, Lee Yong Soon, "the first Korean war bride to arrive in America," received a very warm welcome from the city of Seattle and from her in-laws. The two-page article demonstrates the city's approval and support of the marriage.[17] While these happenings may have been the case for several War Brides, this media representation did not serve as the standard.

Similarly, discrimination against Korean War Brides did not come exclusively from Americans or occur only on American soil. In Korea, friends, neighbors, and strangers spurned or scorned those who engaged in relationships with American military men. One reason for this animosity could be attributed to the Americans' poor treatment of Koreans. The northern Koreans did not possess a fondness for Americans. A radio broadcast from 1955 reveals Korean-American relational sentiments with the comment, "It is quite clear that the Korean people are like flies in the eyes of the American people."[18] Another reason for the hostility from fellow Koreans arose

[12] Amy Lee and Joseph Tse-Hei Lee, "Korean Military Brides in New York," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 8, no. 3 (2007): 460.

[13] Jung Ja Kim Putman, Oklahoma, telephone interview by author, Norfolk, Nebraska, March 21, 2019.

[14] Ayaka Yoshimizu, "'Hello, War Brides': Heteroglassia, Counter-Memory, and the Auto/biographical Work of Japanese War Brides," *Meridians* 10, no. 1 (2009): 116; Cohen and Tucker, 1100; Storrs, 216.

[15] Lee and Lee, 460.

[16] Cohen and Tucker, 1093; Lee and Lee, 460.

[17] "A War Bride Named 'Blue' Comes Home," *Life*, November 5, 1951, 40-41.

[18] "'Racial Contempt' of Americans Scored," Pyongyang to South Korea, January 4. 1955, https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/readex/doc?p=TOPRACE&docref=image/v2%3A12895BC6AA32DB40%40FBISX-1315B446308A25C0%402435114-1315B4755B68D498%40125-1315B475B5C194D8%40%27RACIAL%20CONTEMPT%27%20OF%20AMERICANS%20SCORED.

from the way in which these women interacted with soldiers. They usually met through engagement in an unacceptable yet ancient business. Although a taboo topic in the 1950s, sex outside of marriage did not seem to matter as much when it came to the use of Korean women in the Comfort Women stations for GIs.[19] According to Cho, "The only women Koreans despised more than single mothers were the women who 'mixed flesh with foreigners' because they were whores and traitors too."[20] In America, a line of propriety separated the War Brides from other Korean immigrants.[21] As a result of all these schisms, War Brides "lived at the fringes of the Korean and American societies."[22]

With the amount of discrimination shown to Korean War Brides, they had to find ways to combat the negativity and cope with a disapproving society. Assimilation into American culture arose as one of their primary options—yet another connection between their experiences and those of other immigrants and minority groups. Understanding a foreign language remained a major barrier for these women to overcome. According to Putman, when she immigrated to America, she lacked fluency in English. As a result of the language barrier, she did not leave her home very often.[23] Cho likewise talks about her childhood with her War Bride mother as being filled with attempts to blend in. She mentions that her "mother tried to wring the foreignness out of her tongue by speaking only English."[24] A lack of an understanding of English often affected War Brides' marriages. According to Lee and Lee's article, "Korean Military Brides in New York," many Korean GI Brides experienced "poor English language skills…and…lack of bilingual social services," which ended up making any marital problems they had worse.[25] Sadly, many of the marriages ended in divorce, leaving the War Brides unsure of what to do.[26] Because 1950s society outlined the role of women in America as wife and mother, if a War Bride's marriage ended, she had to find a way to support herself—and possibly her children.[27] The inability to understand English also limited the kinds of jobs War Brides could obtain. Oftentimes, they ended up working in factories or taking positions others had no interest in, such as domestic work.[28]

Korean War Brides faced barriers not only in language but also in loneliness and alienation as they encountered a huge cultural divide.[29] A complete "severing" of a War Bride's past made for a successful assimilation, at least according to American society.[30] Therefore, Korean wives felt pressure to abandon their traditions. In fact, "Bride Schools" existed as a way to provide a

[19] Cho 2018, 312; Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005); 178-181; George Akita and Brandon Palmer, *The Japanese Colonial Legacy in Korea: 1910-1945, A New Perspective* (Merwin Asia, 2015).

[20] Cho 2018, 312.

[21] Lee and Lee, 464.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Putman.

[24] Cho 2018, 307.

[25] Lee and Lee, 463.

[26] Shin; Putman; Lee and Lee, 460, 463.

[27] Storrs, 200.

[28] Storrs, 216; Putman.

[29] Soojin Chung, "History of Korean Immigration to America, from 1903 to Present," Boston University School of Theology: Boston Korean Diaspora Project, accessed April 23, 2019, http://sites.bu.edu/koreandiaspora/issues/history-of-korean-immigration-to-america-from-1903-to-present/#_ftn6.

[30] Cho 2006, 311.

smoother assimilation process for Korean women.[31] Though many tried, assimilation did not prove to be an easy transition. For example, Putman had one of her first encounters with the assimilation process while traveling to her in-laws' home in 1957. While riding in the car, she learned American smoking etiquette. Korean culture dictated that Putman could not smoke in front of her elders. However, her mother-in-law told her about the acceptability of smoking with her in-laws, explaining that all of the family members smoked together. Although she was aware of this change, Putman never smoked in front of her in-laws. Despite this, she did conform easily to other American customs, like learning to cook American foods and doing laundry with a washing machine.[32] Other Korean War Brides assimilated in these ways as well. Cho describes various things her mother did to try to fit into American society, including the food she cooked, the ways she parented, the holidays they celebrated, and the church they attended. She explains that her mother did all of these things "in [the] hopes of becoming the perfect American wife and mother."[33]

Most War Brides experienced culture shock and had to find ways to adjust.[34] Being told to forget where one comes from and all one has known compares to the assimilation experienced by other ethnic groups. Native American children, for example, were taken from their tribes and placed within boarding schools to become more American and effectively erase all traces of their culture.[35] With the establishment of "Bride Schools," assimilation looked very much the same for Korean War Brides. The more they could assimilate to American culture, the better off they would be—according to American society's beliefs.

With the trials these women had to overcome, one might wonder why they did not advocate for themselves more or tell their stories. For some War Brides, voluntarily admitting the account of how they came to America carried with it a heavy weight. The term "War Bride" had a rather unpleasant connotation.[36] Within the Asian countries during the major world conflicts, the Japanese and Korean governments established Comfort Women Stations to service American GIs, as well as their own soldiers.[37] Essentially brothels for military servicemembers, Comfort Women Stations in Korea used ordinary women as prostitutes to protect innocent daughters of the community from sexual assault encounters.[38] Therefore, these types of prostitution centers used many women, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, who later became War Brides.[39] After a woman had been a prostitute, Korean culture dictated that it would be difficult for her to integrate into society again, to marry a Korean man, and to overcome the stigma placed upon her as a "Western Princess."[40] Therefore, only two options existed: continue as a prostitute or marry an American, with the latter as the most desirable choice.[41] Shunned by their local communities,

[31] Cho 2006, 319.
[32] Putman.
[33] Cho 2006, 318.
[34] Lee and Lee, 460, 464.
[35] Chris Steinke, "Acculturation and Boarding Schools," (class lecture, Plains Indian History, University of Nebraska Kearney, Kearney, NE, November 8, 2017).
[36] Lucy Alexander, "Daughters Tell Stories of 'War Brides' Despised Back Home and in the U.S.," *Japan Times*, October 5, 2014.
[37] Lee and Lee, 459; Cumings; Akita and Palmer.
[38] Cohen and Tucker, 1105.
[39] Cho 2006, 310.
[40] Cho 2018, 311; Cho 2006, 310.
[41] Lee and Lee, 460.

Korean War Brides also received the stereotype of prostitute once they arrived in America, even if they had nothing to do with the practice.[42] If one did indeed meet her husband this way, she likely would not go around publicizing that information, jeopardizing her place in society and creating more trouble for herself. Therefore, it would be easier and more suitable to hide her past than to tell the story.[43]

Perhaps another reason for the lack of openness about personal experiences stems from Korean perceptions of Americans. As previously mentioned, anti-American sentiments existed in northern Korea. However, some in the southern portion of the country also had these feelings, especially when it came to relationships between Korean women and American men. To the Koreans, Americans had viewed them as inferiors. Ranked lower in status, the Koreans were supposed to be indebted to the American war effort.[44] The view of the children conceived between Korean women and American servicemen also demonstrates Korean distaste for people of the United States, as many did not want the GI babies in their country.[45] Sometimes the families of women who got pregnant by American soldiers would forge adoption papers to send the children away.[46] Other Asian groups, specifically the Japanese, also expressed these attitudes towards Americans. Debbie Storrs, while telling of her mother's story as a Japanese War Bride, explains that "on the one hand, [her mother] knew that her family would not approve of her dating an American, yet Americans intrigued her."[47] The prevalence of racial slurs used to address the Korean people also did not help white Americans' case.[48] In the years following the Korean War, the Koreans did not welcome Americans as allies and friends but rather viewed them as the instigators of much of their troubles.[49] If one's family disliked the man she had chosen to marry or cohabitate with and she decided to go with him to America, leaving behind relatives, discussing such a falling out with other people probably would not appear as the first thing she would want to do.[50] Therefore, the stories remain largely unspoken.

Although many do not share them, some War Brides have begun telling their stories. This trend, though, exists only within recent years. Interestingly, the daughters of the War Brides—rather than the War Brides themselves—have been the ones to relay their mothers' experiences to larger audiences. In examining the available scholarship on Korean War Brides, one can see this development, as the more tolerant climate of American society nowadays has allowed for such a phenomenon to take place. According to Ayaka Yoshimizu, "Some critical studies have been conducted by daughters of Japanese war brides, and they often involve an autobiographical component in which the authors' research interests are based on their own or their mothers' experience of racism, sexism, and the lack of recognition by American society."[51] In 2014, three daughters of Japanese War Brides—journalist Lucy Craft, National Geographic Photographer

[42] Shin.
[43] Cho 2006, 320.
[44] Cho 2018, 311-312.
[45] Cho 2018, 310, 312.
[46] Cho 2018, 312.
[47] Storrs, 204.
[48] Cohen and Tucker, 1104.
[49] Cohen and Tucker, 1109.
[50] Yoshimizu, 115.

[51] Yoshimizu, 113.

Karen Kasmuski, and *The Washington Post* editor Kathryn Tolbert—worked on a short film to document the trials and experiences of their mothers that released on the 70th anniversary of the end of the war—September 2015.[52] While more of a digital art project than a scholarly work, the twenty-six minute documentary *Fall Seven Times, Get Up Eight: The Japanese War Brides* helps to provide a more personal touch to the stories of War Brides by telling their stories through their daughters.[53]

In opening dialogue with War Brides, the opportunity to reflect has also encouraged efforts to reclaim a lost past. Through the process of assimilating to American culture, these women have maintained their identities by holding on to pieces of their cultures. At eighty years of age, Putman decided that she would try to re-learn the language she was told so long ago to forget. Through her viewing of Korean television, she has picked up on words and phrases she has not used in decades.[54]

As this study shows, the Korean War Brides experienced the same treatment as other immigrant and minority groups in the United States. These women encountered discrimination, endured the process of assimilation, and struggled to share their stories. Their accounts of hardship are just as important to the historical record as any other. White American treatment of Koreans, as well as other immigrants, shows a lot about the character of the nation. The choice to forget the war led to the forgetting of a group of people, which consequently meant they had to forget their own heritage. By continuing to capture some of their experiences, historians can help tell the tale of the GI War Brides from Korea, integrating this history into the larger fabric of America's diverse society.

[52] Alexander.

[53] Lucy Craft, Karen Kasmauski, Kathryn Tolbert, "Fall Seven Times, Get Up Eight: The Japanese War Brides," last updated May 5, 2018, accessed April 23, 2019, https://www.fallsevengetupeight.com/.

[54] Putman.

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